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VA Education Services Unit News



Useful Information for School Certifying Officials and VA Students

Implementing New Legislation

Procedures for implementing the new legislation are being developed by Department of Veterans Affairs Central Office (VACO). Information regarding the new legislation is now available on our Internet news page at <http://www.gibill.va.gov/education/News>

Schools should not hold any claims but continue to process them as normal. VA will accept claims for processing on most of the provisions while on other provisions a list of inquirers will be kept until we receive further instructions by VACO. VA will keep three separate lists, the lists will include: Social Security numbers, addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses if available. Each inquirer will receive instructions and more information as soon as procedures are finalized. **During the last few months many schools have received numerous calls regarding these three provisions:**

CHAPTER 32 (VEAP): Converters To MGIB: MGIB Active Duty (Chapter 30)

VA will keep a list of these inquirers. Final instructions for VEAP Converters have not been received. The Department of Defense (DoD) indicates they are not ready to handle receiving the contributions. DoD's guidelines should be coming out soon! Generally inquirers should be told that electing MGIB is a good idea for every eligible VEAP participant who plans to receive at least six months of training. This provision allows a VEAP participant, whether they have contributions in their account or not, to become eligible for MGIB if they make an irrevocable election to receive MGIB, were a VEAP participant on or before October 9, 1996, and continuously served on active duty from October 9, 1996 through April 1, 2000, and make a nonrefundable payment of \$2700. You may want the inquirer to contact us about receiving our **VEAP Conversion Fact Sheet** concerning this conversion to help them in considering their own situation. The facts about conversion should be considered carefully and the timing of the conversion may make a big difference for some individuals.

Tuition Assistance "Top-Up": Chapter 30

VA will keep a list of each person who issues an inquiry regarding the Tuition Assistance. If the inquirer needs to use the top-up benefits for the winter term 2001 they will be encouraged to go ahead and file the claim. All inquirers will be informed that payments may be delayed while we await development of final payment procedures.

Students who haven't previously filed a claim for MGIB should do the following:

- * Request TA from their branch of service
- * File the TA approval form along with their VA Form 22-1990. The TA forms are different for each branch of service.
- * Indicate, "top-up" on the 22-1990 in item 1A under MGIB-Active Duty block.

Students who previously filed a claim for MGIB should submit their signed TA approval form for claims processing. It is **important to note** that an enrollment certification (VA Form 22-1999) will not be necessary from the school. The approval form will require the signature of the approving DoD official. DoD has indicated their policy will be to pay 100% TA if their budget permits, but this could vary from service to service. If DoD does pay 100%, VA will not pay MGIB. If DoD pays less than 100%, anyone who is eligible can receive the top-up for terms beginning on or after October 30, 2000. The top-up is limited to 36 months. The monthly rate of top-up cannot exceed the monthly rate for full-time training plus the additional amount payable based on contributions up to \$600, and no additional amount for kickers. The monthly rate of top-up has nothing to do with the service member's actual training time. Service members will not charged entitlement for using MGIB as a top-up with TA. They will be limited to 36 months of the top-up, but it won't be charged against their regular entitlement. After each use of top-up, the total monthly rate for MGIB, including kickers and additional amounts payable based on contributions up to \$600, will be reduced based on the amount of MGIB used for the top-up. The top-up can apply retroactively, but only for training in terms that began on or after October 30, 2000.

Extends allowable length of some school breaks for payment of VA education benefits to eight weeks

- **Before this law**—VA education benefits could be paid (with some exceptions) for breaks between school terms, semesters, or quarters, if the breaks didn't exceed a calendar month.
- **Now, with this law**—VA education benefits can be paid (with some exceptions) for school breaks if
 - the breaks don't exceed eight weeks, and
 - the terms before and after the breaks are not shorter than the break

VA Work-Study Employment Assignments

In general, work-study students may be assigned to VA facilities, such as regional offices, medical centers, domiciliaries or insurance centers. There are no limits to the duties students may perform at these sites.

However, assignments are not limited to VA locations. Students may also be assigned to approved educational institutions, the Department of Defense (DOD) or other facilities that service veterans.

In order to be approved, a non-VA facility must provide a work-study position description clearly specifying the student's duties. This description must show VA-related duties which supplement the regular work force without displacing a regular employee. Non-VA facilities have additional limitations concerning assigned duties.

At educational institutions, school certifying officials may assign VA work-study students to assist with VA paperwork processing or gathering information needed for VA reporting requirements. These tasks might include helping to prepare VA forms for the signature of the certifying official, assisting students with various VA forms, or doing monthly check-ins to verify veterans' course-load information with the appropriate school official. Work-study students, however, may not sign certifications for, or in place of, the certifying official or veteran.

Work-study students receiving payment under the Montgomery GI Bill-Selected Reserve (Chapter 1606) while working for DOD, Coast Guard or National Guard facilities must perform duties directly related to Chapter 1606 administration.

Other non-VA facilities, such as employment offices and community organizations, may use a work-study student only to disseminate information on VA benefits and services, to assist individuals in obtaining these benefits and to provide information on other governmental programs beneficial to veterans.

Please contact your local VA work-study coordinator or call 1-888-442-4551 for further information.

Q&As

I HAVE A STUDENT WHO IS SEEKING DEPENDENTS' EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS, (CHAPTER 35). HER FATHER IS A RETIRED GENERAL. WOULD THE STUDENT BE ENTITLED?

Entitlement to Dependents' Educational Assistance has nothing to do with the veteran's rank or title in the military. The student would be entitled if her father is permanently and totally disabled as the result of a service-connected disability. The disability must arise out of active service in the Armed Forces.

WHAT ASSISTANCE WOULD AN ELIGIBLE DEPENDENT RECEIVE?

Dependents receive up to 45 months of full-time education benefits. As of 11/1/00, the full-time monthly rate is \$588.00. Children are generally eligible to use their benefits between the ages of 18 and 26, but in certain instances may begin before age 18 and continue beyond age 26.



REMINDERS

ANNUAL REPORTING FEE

The law requires VA to pay annually to each educational institution furnishing education under 10 U.S.C. Chapter 1606 or 38 U.S.C. Chapters 30, 32, 35, or 36 a "reporting fee." This payment is based on the number of VA students enrolled at the school during the preceding calendar year.

The reporting fee is paid as soon as feasible during the first quarter of the subsequent calendar year. It is computed by multiplying \$7 by the number of eligible veterans and eligible persons enrolled for each calendar year. An additional \$4 will be paid to those institutions which have delivered to the veteran or eligible person at registration the educational assistance check representing an advance payment.

School officials do not need to submit a request for this payment. The VA system of records will automatically calculate and issue a check to the school.

Please remember, the reporting fee is in lieu of any other compensation or reimbursement for reports or certifications the school is required to submit to VA by law or regulation. The payment is intended to support the work of the institution's office of veterans affairs and the certifying officials.

An informational letter about the Annual Reporting Fee is being sent to school presidents and directors, with a courtesy copy

to certifying officials. We are encouraging certifying officials to use the reporting fee money for travel to VA sponsored state, regional and national conferences.

RETENTION OF RECORDS

The records and accounts, including those of students not receiving benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs, pertaining to each period of enrollment of a veteran or eligible person, should be kept intact and in good condition at the school for at least **three years** following the termination of such enrollment period. Longer retention (for VA purposes) will not be required unless a written request is received from the General Accounting Office or the Department of Veterans Affairs not later than 30 days prior to the end of the three-year period. *Your State Approving Agency or other State authority may require retention for a longer period.* Be sure to check with them before disposing of records.

COMPLIANCE SURVEYS

Section 3696 of Title 38 United States Code requires VA to conduct periodic compliance surveys at all institutions offering one or more courses approved for enrollment of eligible veterans or persons. Examination of non-veteran records is required to ascertain compliance. Making these records available for examination by duly authorized representatives of the Government is **NOT** a violation under the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (Buckley Amendment). Refusing to furnish the records needed to ensure compliance is a violation of approval criteria.

THE NUMBERS GAME

File Numbers, Claim Numbers, Payee Numbers
Their History, Anatomy, and Importance

File vs. Claim Number. Actually, they are the same thing. File Number is the wording on VA Forms. We have found that when we ask a claimant for the file number, he or she is likely to respond with his or her telephone number. This is most prevalent when we are dealing with phone inquiries. So, most VA personnel generally use the term Claim Number.

This claim number is found on any letter sent to the claimant. It is in the upper right hand corner two lines under the heading: IN REPLY REFER TO:. It is a series of eight or nine numbers preceded by one of the following:

- C for Claim Number
- XC for Claim Number, Veteran Deceased
- CSS for Claim/Social Security Number
- XSS for Claim/Social Security Number, Veteran Deceased.

When VA was founded in 1930, we started with our own claim number system. These are used for all benefits except Loan Guaranty. A veteran with a disability claim and an education claim has the same claim number. By 1973, the claim numbers assigned sequentially had reached the 29 million (29 000 000) series.

In July 1973, VA switched to using Social Security Numbers as the claim numbers. Due to a number of situations, we could only apply these to brand new cases. Thus, an original claim filed before July 1973 was assigned an old style 8 digit claim number. An original claim filed after July 1973 was assigned the veteran's Social Security Number.

EXCEPTION: Vocational Rehabilitation was not switched then. Claim numbers (the 8 digit variety) continued to be assigned to Voc Rehab cases. This meant that the Social Security claim number was changed to the 8 digit number for the veteran's other claims as well.

In July 1993, new *original* Vocational Rehabilitation claims were brought under the Social Security numbering system.

The Payee Number - or - Chapter 35 Suffix Letter

The veteran's claim number is the claim number assigned to each member of the family who files for benefits under Chapter 35, Dependents Education Assistance. All VA claims have payee numbers, each depending on the particular benefit being paid. Since there are separate files (regular hard copy or electronic TIMS) for each Chapter 35 claimant, the payee number is significant in determining what paper belongs to which claimant. The payee number may also be interchangeably expressed as a letter suffix. This procedure is unique to Chapter 35.

The **payee numbers** and **letter suffixes** used are :

- For spouses (wives, husbands, widows or widowers): 10 or the letter W
- For children: 41 through 49 sequentially, or the corresponding letters A through I.

Assignment of Payee Numbers. Note that each dependent gets a separate payee number. If John has payee number 41 or A, you cannot file a claim for sister Mary using 41 or A. The VA will assign a separate payee number.

Payee numbers are **not** assigned based on the children's age or date of birth. The payee number is assigned on first come, first served basis; that is, whoever files a claim for Chapter 35 first gets the first payee number.

EXAMPLE: A veteran has three children: John, Bob and Mary. John is the oldest, but he decides not to immediately continue schooling after high school. Two years later, Bob graduates high school and files for Chapter 35 for a community college. He becomes payee 41 (suffix A). *Who gets suffix B?* It all depends on who files next. Or, it could be Bill... Veterans are human. There could be children from a previous marriage (or less formal arrangement) that the current family will never tell you about.

How Does the School Know the Claim Number and Payee Number or Letter Suffix?

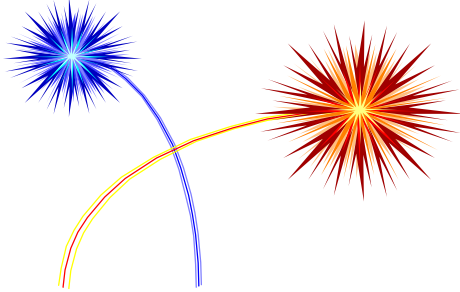
You cannot guess at this. If the veteran has never filed a claim before, the claim number will probably be the Social Security Number, but this is not final until assigned by VA.

For dependents, the claim number is the veteran's claim number. They should be able to produce correspondence from VA with the claim number on it. Remember, however, the payee number will still be assigned by VA.

Tips to help you with the Numbers Game.

1. Always enter the veteran's Social Security number in the SS field or somewhere in the margin of the form. This is our best cross reference.

2. Insist that the claimant bring you the complete claim and payee number as soon as he or she receives it. Keep this on file for further reference.
3. Always use the proper claim and payee number on all future enrollments, forms and correspondence.



**Plan to attend the 2001 Buffalo
RPO Certifying Officials
Conference
June 26th to the 28th**

LOCATION: The conference will be held at the Adam's Mark Hotel in downtown Buffalo, NY, close to our historic waterfront. The hotel, which has just undergone a 24 million dollar expansion and renovation project, is offering all rooms, single or double, at the Government rate of just \$78.00 per night, triple rate of \$88.00 and quad rate of \$98.00.

This is an opportunity to combine business and pleasure. Just a short distance from Buffalo is one of the great wonders of the world, Niagara Falls. We will also have other exciting sites and activities to make your visit enjoyable and rewarding.

The agenda will include program updates from our Central Office and breakout sessions for new school officials, presentations by the State Approving Agencies, military benefit programs, work study program, claims processing, and of course, what's new in the area of electronic certifications and ways to make your job easier.

REGISTRATION FEE: This year a registration fee of \$25.00 per person will be required to help cover the cost of the conference. An informal reception will be held on Tuesday and beverages and snacks will be available during conference breaks. We ask that you complete the registration form and return it with a check or money order for the \$25.00 payable to: **VA Education School Conference**. If you have not received the registration form included with the first mailing, you may print the form from our web site: **www.gibill.va.gov** and look for the link for school officials and link for upcoming events. You can also call your local Education Liaison Representative to have one faxed to you.

HOTEL RESERVATIONS: The Adam's Mark hotel has set aside a block of rooms to accommodate guests for Monday June 26th to Friday the 29th. We ask that you contact the hotel at 1-800-444-ADAM or (716) 845-5100

By doing this you will save us time which will, in turn, expedite the processing of your students' claims.

and indicate you will be attending the VA Education School Certifying Official Conference to make the appropriate reservations at the special rates.

MORE INFORMATION: For more information on the conference, transportation and the Buffalo area, check out the following web sites:

Buffalo Convention and Visitors Bureau at:

<http://www.buffalocvb.org/>

Information on Flights at:

<http://www.nfta.com/airport/carriers.phtml>

Take an online tour of the hotel and make reservations at:

<http://www.adamsmark.com>

Check out the train at: **<http://www.amtrak.com>**

**Technical or Procedural Questions
Who can you call for Help?**

A school Certifying Official with a technical or procedural question should contact the local Education Liaison Representative (ELR). If you are not sure who to contact in your area you can find your ELR on the WWW.GIBILL.VA.GOV web site. Click on "School Officials". Or you can also call 1-888-GI BILL1, the toll free number, and VA representatives will be happy to answer your questions or provide the correct contact point for the ELR in your area.

VACERT for Windows User's Guide is also now available by contacting your local Education Liaison Representative (ELR), or you can download off the Internet VACERT web site. The guide provides detailed instructions on downloading the program, setup, updates, how to use it and troubleshooting.

EDUCATION INQUIRIES TO BUFFALO RPO

**Call Toll Free: 1-888-GI BILL 1
(1-888-442-4551)**

Or,

**Visit our Web site:
WWW.GIBILL.VA.GOV
(Click on "Ask A Question")**

Or,

**Send e-mail inquiries:
BUFFRPO@VBA.VA.GOV**

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*There's usually some fine print, and here is ours:
We will make every effort to keep this Newsletter current and
accurate, but there will surely be times when this is not possible.
These pages are for general information only, your best source of
current information is our toll free number 1-888-442-4551. These*

*pages are not regulatory or binding on the Dept. of Veterans Affairs
or its employees.*

LOCAL SCHOOL MEETINGS SCHEDULED FOR NEW VA CERTIFYING OFFICIALS

Local School Meetings are scheduled for **New** VA Certifying Officials and will cover the basics of certifying veteran-students to VA. Certifying Officials are encouraged to attend a school meeting most convenient to them. Invitations will be forthcoming from your local VA Regional Office. Mark your Calendars. These Meetings are planned for:

Date	Location of Meeting		
3/14/01	Virginia Wesleyan College Norfolk VA	4/04/01	Penn State - Great Valley Malvern PA
3/20/01	Otterbein College Westerville OH	4/05/01	Harrisburg Area Community College Harrisburg PA
3/29/01	Veterans Benefits Academy Baltimore MD	4/10/01	Cincinnati State Technical and Community College Cincinnati OH
3/30/01	State of Connecticut Dept of Higher Education Hartford CT	4/24/01	Owens Community College Toledo OH
4/03/01	Cuyahoga Community College (Western) Parma OH	4/24/01	Days Inn Flatwoods WV
4/04/01	Kelly Army Reserve Center Oakdale PA	5/02/01	VA Regional Office Washington DC

Buffalo RPO Certifying Officials Conference June 26th to the 28th

